



**Arkansas Department of Health
Arkansas Department of Education**



From: Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Department of Education
To: Arkansas Local School Administrators and Officials
Date: March 12, 2020
Subject: Guidance for Schools Regarding COVID-19

The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) are providing the following guidance in an effort to help schools prepare in light of the spreading epidemic of Novel Coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19). The fact of international or national travel from areas affected by the epidemic and now a few cases in Arkansas requires that administrators be prepared for (1) how to answer questions regarding students or staff who may have traveled to areas where community spread of the virus is occurring and (2) begin making plans for what schools will do to help maintain continuity of teaching and learning if there is community spread of COVID-19 in Arkansas in the future.

Background on COVID-19

The virus that causes COVID-19 is transmitted from person-to-person between people in close contact with one another (about 6 ft) through respiratory droplets, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can then land in the mouths or noses of those nearby and be inhaled into the lungs. This transmission is much like other respiratory viruses, such as influenza. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. The illness caused by this virus can range from mild to severe, and the most common symptoms are typically fever, cough and shortness of breath. For more information regarding this virus, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Guidance about Students and Staff Who Have Traveled or Possibly Been Exposed to COVID-19

At present ADH is monitoring travelers who have returned within the last 14 days from affected countries and individuals who have had close contact to known cases. Travelers from affected areas are advised to stay at home and monitor for symptoms until 14 days have passed from their departure from that area, while limiting interaction with others. Once 14 days have passed without any symptoms of illness, CDC recommends these travelers be allowed to return to school and public activities.

- It is recommended that schools communicate with parents to let them know that the district is aware of the risk of COVID-19, the district is working with ADH to identify students and staff who may have traveled from the affected communities and district staff will collaborate with ADH if any such students or staff is identified.

- Districts are requested to identify any student or staff who may have traveled from a country with community transmission within the last 14 days (see link for currently affected countries with Level 2 or 3 Travel Notice: : <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>) This information is permitted to be shared with ADH under the public emergency rule.
- Districts are also requested to identify and report to ADH staff or students who have close contact (such as household) with a laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19.
- Schools should inform their school nurse if any student or staff has traveled to these countries so that the nurse can advise regarding home self-quarantine and assist with self-monitoring.
- If a student is identified as having traveled from an affected area in the last 14 days **and** has symptoms (fever, cough, and shortness of breath), they should immediately be placed in a single room and have a mask placed on them. Others in the room should wear a mask. If physical contact is required, then gown, gloves and mask should be worn.
- **Any suspected case (with symptoms) of COVID-19 should be reported to ADH immediately at 1-800-803-7847.**

Guidance for Schools on Preparing for Possibility of Community Outbreaks of COVID-19

The CDC has said, “As this global outbreak evolves, US communities, including schools, are encouraged to prepare for the possibility of community level outbreaks in the United States.” Therefore, school districts should implement the following steps if community spread occurs in Arkansas:

- Actively encourage sick students and staff to stay home and develop flexible sick leave policies, including for those caring for sick family members.
- Closely monitor absentee rates of teachers and students and determine locally what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning
- Establish procedures for quickly separating sick students and staff from those who are well and for sending the sick home as soon as possible.
- School closure decisions will be made in consultation with the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) and Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). The two agencies will work jointly to provide guidance to districts based on developments in local communities. The ADH and ADE have established a dedicated hotline for districts to call to discuss whether preemptive closures are advised. School officials should call (1-833-504-0155) for guidance prior to making closure decisions due to COVID-19 concerns, including the recommended amount of time for closures.
- Schools that close or dismiss students to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 should also cancel or postpone after-school activities and events that bring together large groups of people.
- As more information becomes available regarding local and regional impacts of virus outbreaks, the ADH and ADE may take additional steps to address the closure of schools statewide

Again, the dedicated line for school officials to discuss guidance from ADH and ADE is 1(833) 504-0155 Monday through Friday from 8 am to 4:30pm. If there is an urgent need after hours or on weekends, call 1(800) 803-7847.

More detailed advice from CDC regarding this planning can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-for-schools.html> .

Recommendations for cleaning and disinfection for schools:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Helpful information on talking with children about COVID-19:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>